

Conference Abstract

Making Education Collections Safe to Touch: Safety Assessments and Data Maintenance

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Abstract

Q?rius is an interactive learning venue at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) designed specifically for a teen audience. The space gives visitors a chance to interact with museum specimens, especially in the Collections Zone. The Q?rius collections are non-accessioned education collections, belonging to the Office of Education and Outreach (E&O). The collections include the Museum's seven disciplines – Anthropology, Botany, Entomology, Invertebrate Zoology, Mineral Sciences, Paleobiology, and Vertebrate Zoology. Starting in 2013, collections staff began performing safety assessments on specimens before their rehousing and storage in the publicly accessible Collections Zone. Risks assessed include sharpness, ingestibility, radioactivity, and contaminants (such as arsenic, mercury, and lead, which were historically used in specimen preparation or for pest management). Specimen and object fragility was also assessed.

The goal of these assessments was to minimize risks to our visitors and to our collections. The safety assessments allow collections staff to make housing recommendations that would ensure the safety of NMNH's visitors and the preservation of E&O's collections in a publicly accessible storage space. This practice now extends to other pre-existing learning venues that contain publicly accessible portions of the E&O Collection, further minimizing risks. Staff have started adding the data gathered by these safety assessments to our

collections management system, to protect the data from loss and to make the information easily accessible to staff. This poster relates to a second poster, *Establishing Legal Title for Non-Accessioned Collections*.

Keywords

safety, risk, education, non-accessioned, acquired, x-ray fluorescence, radioactive, public, accessibility, visitor, school programming, data management, Electronic Museum (EMU), collections management system, databases

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